

The Delta Company

One Commander's Observations

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On the basis of my experiences while commanding an air assault battalion antiarmor company in Korea, I offer several observations on the Delta Company—specifically, its organization, capabilities, and employment:

The antiarmor company should be renamed the infantry heavy weapons company. With the tables of organization and equipment (TOEs) now in effect, this company is more than just a tank-killing unit; it is the battalion commander's organic source of highly mobile firepower.

Given 20 M966 HMMWVs (high-mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicles), Delta Company can field a mix of three weapon systems:

- The TOW missile—maximum range of 3,750 meters, effective against all armor targets, hovering helicopters, and bunkers.

- The Mk 19 40mm grenade machinegun—maximum range 2,212 meters, effective against light armor up to 50mm thick, targets in dead space, and dismounted infantry.

- The M2 .50 caliber machinegun—maximum effective range of 1,830 meters, effective against up to 19mm of light armor, dismounted infantry, and aircraft within 800 meters.

These complementary weapons give Delta Company the ability to engage any target an infantry battalion may face.

The antiarmor company/team should be used as a maneuver company. Our current doctrine pays only lip service to the use of Delta Company as a maneuver element. Field Manual 7-20,

The Infantry Battalion, devotes several paragraphs to the antiarmor company as a combat support unit and only one sentence to its use as a combat unit.

Real-world considerations and experience have proved the effectiveness of Delta company as a maneuver element. Most areas of the world contain road networks, and many threat armies have mounted forces. Antiarmor elements have played an important role in operations from the Joint Readiness Training Center to Somalia. In conventional warfighting operations and operations other than war, missions such as *screen*, *convoy security*, and *cordon and search* require mounted forces that can rapidly shift combat power from one part of the battlefield to another. The commander best suited to plan and lead these mis-

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sions is the battalion's mounted operations expert—the Delta Company commander. The antiarmor commander needs to be considered a maneuver commander with very special capabilities instead of a member of the special staff.

Using the Delta Company as a combat element gives the battalion commander four maneuver units—three dismounted and one mounted. This also gives him the option of task organizing and forming four company teams with a mix of

riflemen and mounted heavy weapons infantry.

Delta Company's capabilities also make it a possible candidate for use as a brigade or even a division asset. Its mobility through slingload operations enables it to place heavy firepower at any point along the battlefield. Delta Company's capabilities are similar to those of the German airborne antitank battalion that Lieutenant Colonel Wolfgang Mettler described in *INFANTRY*'s January-February 1995 issue (page 24). Except for attack helicopters, the Delta Company's combination of mobility and firepower is unmatched by any other unit. And unlike attack helicopters, the company can hold ground and remain in position without having to pull out to refuel.

Our antiarmor doctrine needs to be updated. Most of the current doctrine does not address the company's use as a heavy weapons company or a maneuver element. FM 7-91, *Tactical Employment of Antiarmor Platoons, Companies, and Battalions*, and its related ARTEP manual were produced at a time when the Mk 19 and M2 were not part of the antiarmor company. This series of manuals should be rewritten to include the capabilities afforded by new equipment as well as practical experience from the entire Army. Most Delta Companies and their battalions, brigades, and divisions have developed tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) that incorporate the lessons they have learned. The infantry now needs to standardize these TTPs into doctrine.

Delta Company's heavy weapons are

not good for extended foot movements.

Antiarmor soldiers can march like rifle soldiers when they carry similar loads, but during most missions, they operate with heavy weapon systems that are not designed to be man-portable over great distances. It takes one antiarmor platoon to carry one dismounted TOW, Mk 19, or M2 and its required ammunition into combat. The average soldier in the platoon carries more than 64 pounds of heavy weapons equipment alone. Factoring in his load-bearing equipment, personal weapon, and other gear, his load exceeds 100 pounds. When contact is expected, the antiarmor platoon is best employed in foot movements of no more than two kilometers on hilly terrain, or five kilometers on level ground.

Another disadvantage during long foot movements is the limited amount of ammunition that can be carried. A platoon with a TOW can carry only two missiles. A platoon carrying a Mk 19 will exhaust its rounds after five minutes. A rifle company can get more firepower from its own Dragons, AT-4s, M60s, and 60mm mortars than with heavy weapons that are

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carried forward with only limited ammunition.

Although Delta Company's heavy weapons are not good for foot movements, they can be deployed dismounted in the vicinity of their carriers. Setting up an observation post, finding cover and concealment, or locating the best shots are all good reasons for dismounting heavy weapons. The key point is that they

remain within about 300 meters of their HMMWVs, the source of their mobility and ammunition resupply.

One other possible dismounted mission is an air assault to a blocking position. This mission requires detailed planning and close coordination. The heavy weapons platoon must be landed close to its designated battle position and must have a plan for ammunition resupply and a rapid linkup with follow-on forces must be planned and executed as well.

All antiarmor companies should be completely and similarly equipped. Throughout the Army, there are a number of variations on Delta Company organization. These should be standardized according to a few rules:

- Give all M966 HMMWVs mounts for multiple weapons so that the platoon can mount a TOW and a medium machinegun at the same time, or a Mk 19 and the TOW thermal sight at the same time.

- Put the platoon leader in a fighting vehicle—an M966 HMMWV with a machinegun. Give him the equipment to lead from the front and survive.

- Give the executive officer and first sergeant their own vehicles, since their duties require them to be mobile and to operate separately.

- Give each platoon an organic recovery capability—at least one winch (probably on the platoon sergeant's truck) and one tow bar.

Like every other maneuver element, Delta Company needs fire support. Current modified TOEs do not support the attachment of any fire support personnel to Delta Company. To be fully effective as a maneuver element, however, the company needs fire support soldiers with a digital link to the artillery. Even the addition of one fire support noncommissioned officer can yield more responsive indirect fires, as practical experience has proved. Delta Company also offers the

fire supporters something in return—more powerful and reliable communications (power amplified, vehicle-mounted radios) and a mobile platform (the M966) to carry and mount the ground/vehicle laser locator designators (G/VLLD). Whether it is one soldier with a digital

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message device or a complete fire support team, Delta company needs fire support personnel and can put their abilities to good use.

The Delta Company gives a battalion commander a wide range of capabilities and options that are different from those of the rifle companies. Its mix of heavy weapons enables the battalion to engage and destroy any target on the battlefield.

Delta Company can give the battalion commander a pure mounted combat force or enable him to task organize four companies with a mix of dismounted infantry and heavy weapons. The company's leadership and mobile firepower make it a highly capable maneuver asset. With updated doctrine, proper employment, and a full set of equipment, the Delta Company can reach its full potential as a combat element of the airborne or air assault infantry battalion.

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